

EDITORIALS.

THE PROPOSITION to introduce into the Department of Agriculture at Washington a scientific chief seems to have set people to thinking about the generally unscientific organization of the scientific work supported by the United States government. In a communication to *Science*¹ Mr. Charles W. Dabney, Jr., discusses the need of a national department of science. Established as need appeared in connection with various departments, the scientific agencies of the general government have developed until they carry on work of great variety and extent, for which it appropriates annually nearly \$8,000,000 and employs over 5000 men. A great amount of duplication now necessarily ensues from the fact that by natural extensions of the work in charge of one bureau it often overlaps that of another. Coordination seems to be impossible because the bureaus and divisions are parts of different departments, and therefore under the control of different officers. For example, there are three agencies carrying on land surveys, four prosecuting hydrographic work, and five independent chemical laboratories.

THIS INDEPENDENCE means not only lack of coordination, but, generally, lack of cooperation. No one who is not familiar with the state of affairs in Washington understands how much jealousy and how little cooperation there is officially among these various bureaus and divisions. Apparently the more nearly related their work is, the less inclination there is to fraternize. This condition is not peculiar to Washington. It is only an exaggeration of the official jealousy that one too often finds between university departments that have "jest growed" instead of being adequately organized.

FORTUNATELY we have comparatively little of the personal bickering and even animosity which seems to be the rule in German scientific life, where no one is really satisfied until he has a *Feind*. Whether personal or official, all degrees of this feeling are phases of

¹N. S. 5:73. 15 Ja 1897.

selfishness and arise from a too keen appreciation of one's own importance. It is fostered by official life, and in its extreme development becomes bureaucracy.

THE REORGANIZATION of government scientific work under a single department would be a long step in advance. It can be effected so gradually as not to interfere with the present efficiency. It is not advocated as a panacea. It would not remove jealousy, but it would minimize its evil effects. If proper accommodations for the department were provided, it would save money for investigations by concentrating routine work and enormously reducing the outlay for apparatus and fittings. It ought not to reduce the number of men engaged in investigation, but it might greatly reduce the number necessary for routine and office work. If reasonably administered such a department would not hamper but promote energetic development of research; it would not discourage but foster initiative in heads of divisions. In short the suggestion seems to have everything in its favor and nothing against it but pessimistic fears. If it were adopted as a policy by Congress and executed under the advice of the National Academy, we should expect to see the botanical work of the government promoted rather than retarded by the change.

ANOTHER FLAGRANT case of ignorance of American research has just come to our notice. Indeed from the facts as they are at present known to us it would seem that it is not so much ignorance as a deliberate *ignoring* of American work. In the present number is a notice of the investigations of Paul and Krönig upon the effects of salts and acids in dilute solutions upon bacteria. The effects are due in such cases largely to electrolytic dissociation of the substances and action of the ions thus formed. Paul and Krönig reached the same results, *mutatis mutandis*, as those reached previously by Kahlenberg and True in their researches with beans, and confirmed by Heald with other seed plants. Kahlenberg and True were the pioneers in this line of investigation. They published their results with almost complete details in this journal for August last. Immediately upon its publication a copy of this paper was sent to Professor Ostwald, under whose direction Paul and Krönig were working. This must have been in his hands at least two months before their paper went to press, and probably longer.

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American
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Moreover, other separates, calling attention to the main results of their work, had been sent by Kahlenberg and True some months earlier. It is scarcely conceivable that Professor Ostwald, who reads and speaks English fluently, was ignorant of their work; and it is equally inconceivable that he should not call the attention of Paul and Krönig to it. Not the slightest allusion is made by them, however, even in a footnote or supplementary note, to indicate that there were any antecedent investigations of the same sort. To make it well nigh certain this was not ignorance but ignoring, it may be added that both Kahlenberg and True, neither of whom are personally known to Paul or Krönig, received from these gentlemen copies of separates of their paper. If the case is as it appears at present, it is not necessary for us to characterize such conduct. It declares itself at once unworthy of any man who lays any claim to the scientific spirit.

IN THIS SAME connection attention is called to the "open letter" from Dr. Davis, published in the present number, and which he courteously styles "oversight of American publications." Zukal's "oversight" of Dr. Thaxter's paper on Myxobacteriaceæ seems inexcusable under the circumstances, as does also that of Migula.

It is worth while perhaps to record a striking contrast to the neglect, not to say contempt, with which scientific work done outside the bounds of the German empire too frequently meets there. We have had occasion lately to examine with some care Ludwig's *Biologie der Pflanzen*, published about a year and a half ago, and it is a pleasure to observe the full recognition which he gives to investigations bearing upon ecology in all countries, even in England, America, and France. Apropos of the present discussion it may be added that Migula might have found in this book (dated 1895) a good account of Thaxter's Myxobacteriaceæ, illustrated by copies of the original figures from this journal.

WHEN THE BOTANICAL GAZETTE first suggested the establishment of a laboratory in the American tropics, it referred to the well known establishment at Buitenzorg as an illustration of what
The was intended by the suggestion. This seems to have
Tropical led to some misunderstanding on the part of botanists
Laboratory who pressed the illustration too far. By far the greater part of the Buitenzorg establishment has to do with economic problems, the facilities for research forming comparatively

a small part of the whole establishment financially. It is certainly true that the extensive economic outlay represents an important part of the facilities for research, but such outlay is not essential to the inauguration of facilities for research in the tropics. The use of Buitenzorg as an illustration had reference only to equipment for such scientific work as has brought that station into botanical notice. The suggestion of the *GAZETTE*, and, so far as we know, the thought of the commission, does not contemplate an extensive establishment, with permanent director and staff, but merely an opportunity to work in tropical surroundings.